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Chocolates and Surgery

by [Leptailurus](#)

Summary

It is recall time - and of all the former members of Overwatch, Mercy develops an instantenous crush on that new recruit 'Captain Pharah', being the only one who does not immediately recognize her for who she actually is. Her initial flirt with Pharah turns into embarrassment when she finds out. Unfortunately, knowing her true identity does not exactly change the young doctor's feelings....

Chocolates and Surgery

"I can't wait to see Tracer and Winston again!" Mercy seemed quite excited. "I can't believe how many years it has been."

Genji laughed at the unrestrained enthusiasm. "I can tell, Angela. I am not sure bringing me is the right choice, though."

"Of course you are the right choice," Mercy insisted. "All Winston said is that we should see whether we can recruit people who are willing to make the world a better place, no matter from which part of life. I think you fit that description quite well, Genji."

"But Overwatch and the Shimada clan-"

"This is not Overwatch," Mercy insisted. "This is a group of rogue people who want to help the

world. Maybe a good deal of us have been in Overwatch before, but that, at best, only makes this get together a little more illegal.” She stopped, turned to him and laid her hands onto his shoulders, feeling the warm metal. She enjoyed that his shoulders were transmitting body heat - somewhere inside there was a real man producing temperature and a heart that was beating. She was glad that she had been given the chance to make it so.

“Genji, I think you would be a great addition. And you know what - Winston and Tracer jokingly called this ‘bring-a-friend-day’. I can think of no friend that is more dear to me and more capable than you are.”

She knew he was smiling. Of course there was little to see beyond the mask, but she always knew.

“Besides,” she added. “I hear that Winston is bringing in another scientist and Jack said something about a ‘former criminal’. You can’t be the worst choice,” she teased and he chuckled.

“Alright. Let’s see your band of rogues and see whether I can fit in.”

“I don’t think this is a competition who is bringing in the most suitable person,” Pharah laughed at Tracer. She was sitting on a chair, the wrong way, with her arm crossed on the backrest. Lena could not seem to sit still and was just walking aimlessly about the room.

“Regardless, I am going to win! I am bringing in a Raptora Mark IV captain with extensive security training and a long standing history as a soldier!” she beamed.

Pharah smiled. “Thank you. It has always been my dream to be in Overwatch.”

“This is not Overwatch,” Tracer clarified.

“I know. But it is as close as it can ever get and I could not be happier!” Pharah assured her. “It’s all I ever dreamed of.” She looked at the door. “Are they all going to be here?!” she asked. “I mean - Jack? Reinhardt? Winston?” She felt so giddy. She could not wait to see them all again. She of course knew about Gabriel’s story, but the others...! It had been so long - she had still been a kid.

“I think so!” Tracer said with much the same excitement. “Oh! I can’t wait to hug my big, fluffy, peanut-butter addicted monkeyboy!”

As if on cue, the door opened and Winston made his way inside, looking more nervous than he should have been. After all, he had instigated this! Tracer spotted him and blinked over so quickly, he did not realize she was there until she was already around his neck, hugging the air out of him (or at least trying to).

Pharah laughed watching them, her heart filled with excitement. He was the second member she was going to reconnect with after Tracer and she felt so nervous. So much had changed in all these years - most of all she had. Last time she had seen Winston, she had been just a little girl.

“Who’d you bring, who’d you bring, who?!” Tracer squealed excitedly.

Winston laughed his deep, rumbling laughter. “If you’d let me get away from the door...” he suggested.

“Oh! Oops!” Tracer disengaged from her big old friend and let him walk all the way into the room - only to see that he was not alone. Behind him was a small, cute woman with glasses like

Winston and an adorable smile.

“Tracer - this is Mei-Ling Zhou. She is a climatologist and an excellent scientist - with power over ice and snow that you would not believe!”

“Oh goodness, Winston!” Mei laughed embarrassedly. “He means to say I have a freeze-gun and an interest in the same causes as you have.” She looked at Tracer curiously. “You must be Tracer! Winston cannot stop talking about you. Oh - is that the chronal accelerator?!” She squeezed past the big ape and looked right through Tracer’s chest. “That is so cool!”

Tracer grinned. “That is also my chest.” It wasn’t the first time this has happened.

“Oh!” Mei replied, blushing. “I did not mean to--”

Tracer laughed. “All good. Here, I will take it off for you if you want to have a look. But no touching, okay?”

She slipped out of the device.

“Don’t you need it?!” Mei replied in shock as the skinny woman slipped the accelerator over her head.

“No, but don’t run off with it or who knows what century I will go to! I kind of do not want to miss out on this reunion!”

Mei nodded enthusiastically and took the accelerator from Tracer with the utmost care to put it down in a corner and examine it carefully. Winston proudly followed her to explain the technical details to the scientist.

Tracer, now unable to blink, returned to Pharah, apologizing that Winston had apparently not even noticed her there. But the young Egyptian just smiled. “I think everyone is really excited - I understand that.”

The room was getting more and more crowded and every time the door opened, Pharah jerked out of every conversation she was in to see who of her former idols would walk in next. She could not wait to see Reinhardt!

“What a party!” Hana Song said who called herself D.va in her various other functions. She grinned. “Torbjörn is so funny... he really thought bringing me here would make me let him examine my Mech!” she winked at Pharah. “I am still glad he thought of me when all this ‘recruit more people’ stuff happened. This is so exciting!”

Pharah did want to talk to her more - she was obnoxious, but really nice. However, the door opened again and her heart leaped with joy. It was Jack Morrison in the flesh! She of course did not dare to just rush over - surely, Winston, Tracer and Torbjörn should have their first go at him. After all, they had been in Overwatch and were probably even more excited to be reunited. She could wait.

So instead of watching what the veteran members were doing, she at least tried to pay attention to D.va, but was almost unable to do so. Luckily, Mei joined them soon after and took the conversation from Pharah. Now she could concentrate on the people crowded around Jack Morrison and how excited she was to see them.

When the first commotion had died down again, she made her way over, waiting patiently until it

was her turn to say hello.

Jack did a double take. "Is that really you, Fareeha?"

"Yes, it's me," she smiled. "I am so honored that Tracer brought me."

"And we are lucky to have you here. From what I hear you have made an excellent career with Helix. Your mother would be so very proud of you."

That compliment had an unwanted bitter taste to itself. "I am not sure about that." However, she did not want to ruin the mood. "It feels so good to see you and everyone else! And I do love Winston's idea to bring people who would be reliable helpers for the cause. You should come meet them, they are all---" she stopped in her track, realizing she was so excited, she was talking way too much.

"All what?" Jack wanted to know.

"---really nice, I wanted to say."

Tracer zoomed over - still without her accelerator, but fast on her long legs, nevertheless. "By the way, who did you bring?" she said, raising her finger inches away from Jack's nose, as if about to poke him.

"Jesse," he smirked. "He will be here shortly."

"Oh, come on! That's cheating! McCree was in Overwatch already!" she protested.

"Blackwatch, technically. But sorry, he was the only one I could find," he laughed. "I thought about bringing someone else, but she couldn't decide to come," he added, sending a brief look to Pharah that felt a little at odds with the young woman. But it passed as quickly as it had appeared. "And I am not sure Pharah would not fall into the same 'cheating' category; Lena."

"She was not in Overwatch!" Tracer corrected proudly.

"She would have been."

Pharah smiled - that much was true.

The door opened once more time and this time, Pharah did not let anyone else get to it before her. "Reinhardt!" she yelled out excitedly and rushed over - feeling like a kid once more. His hair was as white as ever and his smile still the same. She hugged him immediately now finally able to reach his neck without help.

"Oh, I can't believe my eyes! This can't possibly be Fareeha!" he yelled out in his usual, wall-crumbling volume and hugged her. "Be careful! My back is not what it used to be!" he reprimanded her. She disengaged with a feeling of intense guilt. What a great start, Fareeha, she thought to herself. Break one of your heroes' backs right away!

He looked her up and down. "When did you grow so much?" he smirked. "Where is that little girl that would demand to be picked up for hugs?! I think you're an imposter!"

She laughed back at him. "I'm afraid not." She almost felt like she had always been part of it all. It was so exciting. But it was also time to let the others reunite and she politely stepped back again, off to the side to let them exchange their greetings.

"So. Looks like we have to pick up the slack for all these old geezers, huh?" a voice said next to

her. She blinked at a tall, muscular woman with bright magenta hair and the most rectangular head she had ever seen. “I love it!” the woman laughed.

“Uh---?” Pharah looked at her with much confusion until the woman extended a hand.

“Aleksandra Zaryanova,” she introduced herself. “I think I am going to like it here!”

“Fareeha Amari,” Pharah introduced herself and looked at the white-haired Jack, the folds in Torbjörn’s eye and the way that Reinhardt was patting his own back. “Goodness... they really have become old geezers...!” she realized.

They both started laughing at the same time.

It was easy to get into conversation with Aleksandra, who normally went by the name Zarya. It turned out that Reinhardt had picked her off from the Russian army - based on a half-drunk arm wrestling match that Zarya had won single-handedly. Pharah did not even doubt that - the woman seemed to have more muscle mass than all of her Helix team combined.

They sat down at the big table, the conversations around them buzzing. The old members of Overwatch were all huddled together, exchanging news and memories while Pharah stayed with the people that the old members had brought. She did not feel like she belonged elsewhere.

“So, is everyone here?” Hana Song asked. “I thought there were more members, kinda?”

Pharah related what she could - about Gabriel, about her mother and Gérard Leroux. “Come to think of that... I thought Mercy was going to join this reunion...!” she realized. She wondered what had become of her. Back then, all the other members had felt sort of timeless, except for Mercy. She had felt young and like she was still on her way to head to some big places in her life.

“Oh! I remember her!” Mei replied. “We ran into each other briefly before I went on a research mission for Overwatch...!”

“Wait - you were in Overwatch?” Pharah could not remember her for the life of her. And neither had Tracer or she would have called Winston out on cheating the bring-a-friend thing himself.

“Oh... a whole different story,” Mei related. “I was in a science program that had nothing to do with what these people were doing.” She pointed at the group of veterans. “Except maybe Winston.”

Pharah was going to reply, but then the door opened one last time and someone who was without a doubt Angela Ziegler walked in. She was still as blond and blue-eyed as ever, still wore her ponytail and her long bangs to one side of her head. And unlike the other veterans, she did not seem to have aged at all.

She was followed by what seemed to be an omnic with a very distinct, lean, human shape. Pharah assumed that this was Mercy’s addition to the team.

“Oh! I heard about him,” Mei related.

“The omnic?” Zarya asked with obvious distaste in her voice.

“I think he’s just an enhanced human. Dr. Ziegler made big news saving his life by replacing huge parts of his body. It was an unheard of, complicated and amazing achievement in neurosurgery.”

“I would rather have died,” Zarya remarked bitterly.

"I think he looks kind," Mei retorted in a soft voice. "I hear he has been a student of Master Zenyatta, who himself was a student of the recently assassinated Monyatta."

"That does not make this any better!" Zarya snorted. "Seems like he is more omnic than human, then."

"You are quick to judge," Mei replied bitterly. "I understand your distaste, you know - because of what the omnics did to Russia. But we can always view everyone - flesh or circuits - as an individual before we pass judgment. Everything else is bullying. And I hate bullies."

That last bit was so strong, it essentially shut Zarya up. "I'm not here to argue," she just mumbled.

The tension was an uncomfortable one. They had been here for maybe an hour and things were already getting salty between two of the newer members? Maybe Pharah should have tried to connect with the veterans more, for the sake of her old times. It would sure have been a little less heated.

She watched Mercy make her rounds greeting everyone. The woman was obviously elated to be back - like all the other members. After a while, she took care to make her way over to the new people.

"Hello!" she greeted with a swift wave of her hand. "Is that really you, Mei?"

"Dr. Ziegler, it's been such a long time, but you still look the same."

"So do you," Mercy replied kindly. Then she looked at the other recruits on the table. "And who are you?"

"Zarya - from the Russian army," Zarya replied immediately.

"D.va - from-"

"Oh! I have seen you!" Mercy cut in excitedly. "They did a documentary about you on World Today!" She beamed with excitement. "I can't believe with all the things you are doing, you still find time for this!"

D.va laughed. "The more, the better, right?"

Mercy finally turned to Pharah. "And you are...?" she wondered, looking her up and down. Pharah blinked, but she thought quickly.

"Captain Pharah from Helix Security in Egypt," she replied with confidence. "Nice to meet you, Dr. Ziegler." She could only hope no one around would spill her secret and she tried hard not to laugh.

"Nice to meet you, captain," Mercy replied with a bright smile. Tracer was calling for Mercy from the other side of the room. "Oh, sorry. We'll talk later!" she excused herself and hurried back to the other veterans.

Pharah turned back to her table full of new recruits and laughed into her hand. "She doesn't recognize me!"

It was later that day, when a few formalities with the new recruits had been cleared that Mercy found herself with a little drink, provided by Winston for the occasion. She was eyeing the hot

Egyptian, Captain Pharah, at the other end of the room when Genji joined her.

“Your eyes are going to fall out, Angela,” he teased.

“Phh...!” she puffed out. “How would you know what I am looking at?” she defended.

“I know what your type is,” he replied and she could well hear the smirk in his voice. “You should probably go talk to her, though,” he suggested.

“You are a fine friend, Genji!” Mercy retorted. “Telling me to go all hormonal with strangers on the first day!”

Genji chuckled in return. “I know that’s what you will do eventually.” She gave her a gentle nudge to the shoulder. “I was going to talk to Tracer, anyway. It sounds like she has heard of my master and feels he is an inspiring personality. And she was a huge fan of Mondatta.”

Mercy turned to him with a nod. “Fine. But only because I want to get to know all of these people, anyway!”

She made her way over where Captain Pharah who was just refilling her cup with water, turned away from everyone else. “Ah, no more champagne for you, Captain?” Mercy asked.

“I have had my polite glass already,” she smiled. “But I do not want to drink too much here. This is way too important to me, Dr. Ziegler.”

“Oh, you are making me feel so old. Please call me Mercy like everyone does.”

She smiled and nodded. “But then you have to drop the ‘Captain’.”

“Done,” Mercy agreed. “And also... don’t worry too much about the drinking. You will soon find that all of us are very amicable people who are having lots of fun together when we are not fighting for the greater good.”

“I don’t doubt that...” Pharah replied and raised her glass. “To making the world a better place?” she offered as a toast.

Mercy repeated the line and put her glass against Pharah’s and they both took a sip. She noticed the tattoo under the Egyptian’s eyes. “How amusing,... there was another captain in Overwatch who had a tattoo much like yours.”

“Oh - the udjet is a common symbol of protection,” the Egyptian explained. “I always found it was my duty to protect the innocent from harm and pain. Not everyone has the opportunities and abilities to fight for themselves, protect themselves and help themselves. And that is where people like us come in - those who can help and should not ignore that they can.”

“I agree,” Mercy replied, refraining from commenting that she did not think fighting was generally a good solution, outside of absolute necessity. After all, she did want that woman’s interest, not argue with her. Captain Pharah was indeed a very beautiful young lady. She had a prominent face with dark eyes and a warm tan, not to mention just the right amount of well-defined muscles, as far as Mercy could see.

“So, what is your skill, to be exact? Mine is patching people back together in any way I can.”

“I see,” Pharah replied, taking another drink and tilting her head, the two strands of her separated on either side of her head swinging gently. “Mine is launching rockets from the sky. If you have ever heard of the Mark IV Raptora suit... that’s what I am piloting. It’s very popular for Helix.”

“A rocket launcher?” the Swiss woman replied with raised eyebrows. “Well... considering how even my very little weapon ricochets...” She paused for effect, “That explains your well-defined muscles, I suppose.”

Captain Pharah nearly choked on her drink at that, apologizing profoundly once she had managed to get the cough under control.

“No, I am the one who is sorry,” Mercy replied, but she did not sound sorry at all. “You know... anatomy just catches my eye. It’s a stupid medic thing that happens to nearly all surgeons.”

“Well... I think Zarya over there should be the object to study,” Pharah suggested.

“Maybe... but that’s a little too much for my taste,” Mercy replied coyly. She flicked her ponytail, over her shoulder as it had fallen to the front it as she had turned her head towards Zarya. “Well, Pharah... if you have any questions about Overwatch and these people, or maybe need a place to stay for a night or two, let me know.” In a smooth move, she pulled her business card from the hospital from her pocket. “I wouldn’t want you to feel unwelcome.” Her smile was quite a purposeful one.

Pharah cleared her throat, straightened her back like a good soldier and took the card from Mercy. “Thanks...!” she managed to choke out.

“Well, I shall talk to the other new recruits, I suppose.” She decided to end the first encounter right here, thinking she had made her point clear enough without being too direct. “I am looking forward to seeing more of you, Pharah.”

“R-right,” Pharah replied, desperately holding on to her composure. “See you, Mercy.” When the blond doctor had turned around, she clasped a hand over her mouth to hold back a giggle. Dr. Angela Ziegler was flirting with her, still under the impression that she was nothing but the captain of some security firm. She was lucky that she had been able to skillfully turn the talk away from the subject. Who knew how long it would have taken Mercy to catch on to the points of resemblance between Ana Amari and her. She had the genes of her father to thank for not being even more recognizable.

That afternoon, Winston related the infiltration event that had prompted him to recall Overwatch to everyone at the base. He even had security footage of Gabriel - Reaper - barging in to steal the data of their whereabouts. Seeing Amélie Leroux be what she had become was painful to watch for Mercy... especially knowing what she had done to Ana.

Winston emphasized, again, why he had decided on calling everyone back together and Athena, the computer, helped out with images of the destruction and attacks that caused everyone so much grief. Jack wanted to know everyone’s motivation to follow the calls of the people that had brought them here and join them, emphasizing that what they were doing was on the edge of legality and that he would understand it, if anyone decided to leave.

Jesse McCree did not have much to say about it - obviously being a criminal wasn’t that much of a deal to him and he still stood behind the cause. Aleksandra Zaryanova and Hana Song both seemed passionate about reducing the pain and destruction that was still wrecking the world and the people that they cared for. They had, despite being young, seen already too many bad things and both did not seem like the types who could just stand by and watch.

Genji related ideals he had adopted from Zenyatta and Mondatta in a very calm and composed manner, emphasizing that he thought there were causes worth fighting for, despite his peace-

loving nature.

“My master shares the same ideals and he has taught me a lot about not standing back for the sake of peace.” He looked around. “In fact, he, too, might be willing to support us. I will definitely have a conversation with him about what we are setting out to do.”

Tracer’s eyes went big at that. She obviously thought it was a fantastic idea and Mercy could not have agreed more.

Mei-Ling Zhou’s approach was a rather touching one about always wanting to save the environment, but having gone through an intense experience that had made her think she wanted to help the people on the planet as well. Much like Pharah had mentioned earlier, she had talents she did not want to go to waste if they could instead help a good cause.

Winston seemed proud of his pick for the group and Genji whispered that he sensed a strong, determined spirit in the otherwise so sweet looking woman.

“What about you, Fareeha?” Jack addressed Pharah.

“Well, my mother has always been part of Overwatch and for the longest time I may not have understood it. But then, when I was little, I wanted nothing more than to be part of it. Overwatch’s ideals were my ideals and even though mum did not always condone that wish of mine, it has never changed. I cannot replace her - I am not a sniper - but I can do what she always tried to do: Protect her team, protect the people who need help and never give up on her hope to create a better world for those who follow after us.”

There was a gasp from Mercy at that, the dots connecting in her head - and the images. The little girl in her dress with her dark eyes, short hair and bright grin, two little strands dangling from her head, claiming for all the world to hear that one day, she would be an Overwatch hero.

Mercy wanted to die right there, turning red - surely inexplicable to the rest of the group - and ashamed beyond hope. How could she have possibly missed this?! She still had the same smile - dammit, she had almost the same haircut. Why hadn’t she just asked Tracer where on earth she had picked that captain up?

‘God, I even knew Ana’s daughter went into security after Overwatch was no more!’ she scolded herself.

She did not dare to look at Pharah, remembering how she had shamelessly fitted the young woman with her phone number, invited her to spend a night or two and admired her muscles!

‘Wie peinlich! Ich möchte am liebsten in der Erde versinken!’

There was a gentle nudge to her shoulder and she looked up, right into Pharah’s admittedly still gorgeously beautiful face.

“Sorry,” the young woman whispered at her. “It was just too much fun.”

Mercy just blushed even more. “I am so embarrassed...” she whispered back. “And so sorry. I just didn’t think about how many years have gone by...”

“Yes, it’s been a while, hasn’t it?” Pharah replied in kind. “I can hardly believe this place still exists.”

Mercy wished that right now, she herself did not exist.

“No, Helix is lead by my next in command right--” Pharah started coughing before she could finish the sentence. “Sorry.” She cleared her throat. “Right now, I mean. We are well-staffed, no one missing. It’s okay. I can be here until June--” she coughed again, “--June 23rd.”

“Perfect,” Winston replied. “That gives us ample opportunity to help move the reactor back to the bunker. You should just make sure you don’t actually launch a rocket at the load.”

“How bad of an aim--” she coughed briefly - “do you think I have?” she laughed.

“Sorry, I did not mean to insult you, Pharah,” Winston replied with much embarrassment. “The results would just be devastating!”

“Don’t worry.” She cleared her throat and drank a bit of her water. “I think if you have the specifications of the container, I could help make sure there are no weak points. I know a thing or two about ro- excuse me - rockets.”

“Okay, Fareeha, I can’t listen to this anymore,” Mercy said, coming in from the adjacent room.

“I’m fine. It’s just a cough,” Fareeha replied dismissively, whole-heartedly suppressing what seemed to become another coughing attack. “A mint and a good cup of tea and I am good.”

Mercy sat down on a chair next to her, turning it towards her. “And you made your medical degree where exactly?” She reached out and laid her fingers on Pharah’s neck, feeling for her lymph nodes with a critical look on her face.

“Mercy--”

“Shh!” Mercy hissed back. Pharah rolled her eyes, but she did stop talking - for as long as it took until Mercy removed her hands.

“I am fine, really. It’s nothing that’s going to bother me much.”

“Yes, I know - heroes don’t get sick. Ever,” Mercy snorted and got up. “Come on. You have an appointment with the doctor. Now.”

“Sorry Wins--” Pharah coughed. “Winston.” Then she obediently followed Mercy to the little examination room at the end of the base. She was forced to sit down and felt slightly ridiculous being examined by someone she usually went on missions with.

The doctor herself had heard the ‘I’m fine’ excuse at least one time too many to let it pass. Plus, Pharah’s cough did sound like it was coming from someplace deep and someone who gets shaken by coughing fits in mid-air was far more likely to miss where they were aiming - not to mention in no physical condition to be at their best. Under Mercy’s watch, no one was going to jeopardize themselves out of sheer determination.

She instructed Pharah to open her mouth to see her tonsils which the young woman let her do without verbal complaint, but a bit of an eye roll. Once she was done taking her temperature, she instructed Pharah to remove her shirt. By that time the Egyptian’s patience was all but completely used up.

“Come on, at least tell me what you’re thinking so far. You are looking at me all critically.”

“I’m thinking that you are sick and going to get worse,” Mercy replied. “Your lymph nodes are swollen, though your tonsils are fine, at least.”

Pharah pulled her shirt over her head while Mercy got her stethoscope.

“So what? All this fuss over a-” she coughed again, “over a cold?”

Mercy sighed. “Yes. Over a cold. Because ignored colds can turn pretty nasty.” She listened to Pharah’s lungs as she was breathing and let her cough here and there. Yet, for a moment, she felt herself slide out of any professionalism and just very consciously take in the shape of Pharah’s well-defined abs and the roundness of her breasts under her bra.

“What? Anything wrong?” Pharah asked with a tad of alarm to her voice because Mercy was hesitating in mid-move.

“You need to be quiet, Pharah...” Mercy replied, trying to sound more professional than she felt right now. “I can’t hear anything when you are talking.” She slipped the end of the stethoscope under the back of Pharah’s bra and asked her to cough again. When she was done, she pulled the ear pieces out of her ears and took a step back, trying her darndest not to stare at Pharah’s upper body.

“You are really getting a cold and your lung is not entirely clear,” she presented her verdict. “I am assuming that you are going to get more sick until the end of the week before it gets better.”

“Oh come on, I don’t want to get sick,” Pharah sighed and stifled another cough. “You sure know a way to stop this, right?” she asked hopefully.

Mercy shrugged apologetically. “Not really. I can suppress your cough, but that is not good for you, so that will have to be just for sleeping. And other than that... well, people have been riding colds out since the beginning of time, I suppose. But with the help of some vitamins, lots of fluids, soups and maybe a few good baths, we can at least help your immune system get a good grip on it - then maybe it won’t be too bad.”

Pharah leaned back onto her hands - much to Mercy’s distraction as it made both her abs and her arm muscles stand out more. She tried to remind herself that Pharah was not only her rogue colleague, but also that little kid she used to see running around between Reinhardt and Gabriel, trying to keep them from catching and tickling her. Her interest in Pharah’s physique was certainly misplaced here.

“So what? The mission is off?” Pharah frowned.

Mercy shrugged. “We’ll see. Let me try to get you back on your feet and maybe you’ll be fine in time.” She grabbed Pharah’s shirt and threw it back at her - she really needed Pharah to cover herself up, dammit.

Pharah put it back on and coughed, this time not suppressing it. Mercy took that as a cue to pick out some medication from her cabinet and fill some of it into a container for Pharah. While the printer worked on a label with instructions to put on the container, Mercy grabbed the first pill and filled a glass of water for Pharah and handed that over.

The young Egyptian was an obedient patient, but she sure looked displeased with her diagnosis.

“You’d do good staying away from the others, or I’ll have them all lining up for cough medication,” Mercy instructed.

“Ah, yes - and where would I go? All I have is a bunk bed here. And I think your hospital won’t take me.”

Mercy could practically see the cold viruses celebrating a party in the base kitchen and on the conference table. She didn't even know whether anyone ever cleaned that place.

"You can come to my apartment. I have a guest room and you will not be endangering anyone but me, and I am working at a hospital - so I am pretty much immune to any cold variant by this point." That was not entirely true, given the mutation rate of those pesky viruses, but she was sure her defense mechanisms were only beaten by kindergarten teachers who were constantly exposed to snotty kids. "I have my address here somewhere..." she said, looking around for her spare stack of business cards.

Fareeha chuckled, though it ended in a cough. "I have your address, remember? In case I need to 'stay somewhere' or want to learn more about Overwatch... so I don't feel..." she paused. "'unwelcome'."

Mercy felt a rush of embarrassment. "I-- that - I can't believe you didn't tell me who you were!" she fended off the teasing.

"Honestly, I can't believe you didn't see it. I should feel insulted. But then you were so nice to me!" Pharah grinned.

Mercy was blushing already. If only Pharah knew that knowing who she was did not change anything about how attractive Mercy found her. She decidedly handed Pharah her pills and told her she was dismissed.

"I am leaving the base around seven tonight, so if you want, I can take you home."

"Sounds good. But I don't do 'come up for coffee' on a first date, okay?"

"Pharah!"

Pharah's cheekiness did not last for too long. Within two days, she had gotten really sick and was making the distinct impression of a miserable person with a cold - with raw skin from blowing her nose, glassy eyes and a sheen of sweat on her skin at nearly all times.

Mercy tried to be all of the nurse she could be between working at the hospital and stopping by at their secret base, but Pharah, being the brave soldier she was, was very self-sufficient and trying her best to act tougher than she looked - to the point where Mercy asked her to just let herself be taken care of when she was home.

After some convincing, Mercy managed to get Pharah to let her make some soup for her, squeeze some fresh hot lemon and get baths and tea ready. It even led to this and that moment of gratitude as Pharah realized the benefit of having an actual doctor around. It wasn't like Mercy did anything that anyone else could not have done, except that maybe, she had a better feeling for the right moments to do those things.

She was very alert when it came to the frequency and intensity of Pharah's coughing and seemed to have a fuming chamomile tea ready for inhaling just when Pharah was at her worst. Not to mention that Mercy seemed to know the best time point for Pharah to take a cough suppressant so she could sleep.

Mercy, in return, was maybe a lot more disturbed by this living arrangement than she would have admitted. Before and after Fareeha was at the peak of her cold, Mercy got to enjoy Pharah's personality in a much closer setting - from the tidiness in her few possessions that marked her as a typical soldier to the way she laughed when she found something really funny.

And the more she told herself that she could not allow herself to have any such interest in Fareeha Amari, the more she fought it, the worse it got. What she had brushed off as her own embarrassment when remembering how she had shamelessly flirted with Fareeha, turned from feeling slightly uncomfortable to full-fledged jolts in the pit of her stomach, if she was not prepared ahead of time that she would be running into her.

And she could not get out of her head what Genji had said. "I know what your type is." Yes, he did - he had seen her crush before and always been ready to let her confide in him. And more often than not, her people of interest had been dark-haired and dark-eyed with lovely tanned skin, an impressive physique and that certain something that she could also read in Pharah's eyes.

Genji had once called it 'The strongest will'. There was something in the way Pharah's expression - a determination or a certainty of some sort that only very few people had and that always made Mercy feel particularly weak. And here, that perfect expression was wrapped in the kind of exterior that could simply confuse her. She had literally once bought something completely useless in a shop because the sales woman's particularly beautiful mid-eastern appearance had completely undone her - sometimes an intense look from someone as beautiful as Pharah could turn Mercy into a nervously fidgeting teenager against her will.

Pharah had all that - the look, the beauty, the smile, the gestures... that little, occasional cheekiness that could be completely overruled by her sense of duty - and a whole lot more. Mercy could have sworn that more often than not, Fareeha's pleasantly dark voice carried the sound of an unintentional smile in it.

Mercy thought about this and a lot of other things while she was laying in bed, hearing the occasional cough from the guest room.

'I can't let this happen...!' her head protested and immediately followed it up with 'but it already happened...!' She grabbed a spare pillow and hugged it to herself wondering what she was going to do.

Having feelings for someone was a good thing, in general, but Fareeha had at best laughed about Mercy attempting a flirt with her because it was just too ridiculous. Under any other circumstances, Mercy would have agreed. Except, of course, that her circumstance was now that her heart did not care about how ridiculous that was. Rationality had never been part of that equation.

She stared into the darkness. 'You can't have feelings for her, Mercy. It could not be more wrong.'

But the feelings were there and telling herself all the reasons why she should not have them only made her think about Pharah more - and it made everything so much more intense. And a little bad because she was fully aware of her lack of prospects of this going anywhere. It would just be something she had to get over as quickly as she could.

Only... how was she supposed to do that? Pharah was everything she could want - everything she had appreciated in a woman, ever, wrapped up in one compact, perfect bundle. She could not just get over such perfection at will. Anything else would just be so much less in comparison.

In her head, she could hear Pharah laugh about it all, and it made her feel a ridiculous longing beyond her control.

“You’ve been so kind to me, maybe I could take you out to dinner before I leave?” Pharah suggested, her cough almost completely gone, except for some moments in the evening when it somehow kept revisiting her.

“Leave?” Mercy frowned. “I think Ana would come back to haunt me if I let you sleep in a bunk bed at the base again.”

“That’s okay. For the time being, Zarya, Mei, D.va and I are going to rent a small place and just camp together like we’re all ten years younger. Except for D.va, of course. It’s better for us, too, because with all our other engagements, there is a likelihood we will be gone a lot. If we share it, there is a chance that on average at least one of us will actually be in that apartment”

Mercy tried to not show her disappointment, but it was difficult enough. “Oh...”

“Besides... I thought you might want to help Genji stay someplace nice since he’d be a little... misplaced in our all-women apartment, I suppose.”

“Genji is back in Japan for the time being... available on call,” Mercy said half mechanically. “But if you’d rather---” and both of them could tell that at this moment, the conversation was getting awkward.

“I am sorry - I did not know I was doing something wrong getting out of your hair...”

“No...!” Mercy hurried to reply. “I am just- it was nice having someone around, that’s all.”

Pharah smiled. “Oh, well, in that case - you are welcome to stop by anytime you want. We have a potential place in mind and it is not even far from here.”

Mercy took a deep breath. “Thanks, Pharah.” It felt a bit less weird to call her Pharah than Fareeha. It seems Fareeha was that little, overexcited girl who Ana was loving, scolding and who had meant everything to that woman, while Pharah was the smart, Egyptian Raptora pilot with the deep eyes and warm, low voice.

So that was that - Pharah would pack her backpack and then they would occasionally run into each other at the base. No more TV evenings, no more bringing her tea... no more knowing - just knowing - that she was sleeping only two rooms over... so close. Maybe it was for the best.

“So - dinner?” Pharah repeated with a smile as she found Mercy so distracted in her own thoughts.

“Oh. Yes,” she said quickly.

“Is Italian good for you? I don’t know what is around, but Zarya claims that she found the best Italian restaurant ever. We could try it.”

Mercy nodded. “Sounds good. I’ll be back from my shift around seven tonight. That should work, right?”

“Perfect. I can pick you up at the hospital, if you want.”

“Doc, that’s five milliliters, not three...!” the nurse said kindly as Mercy was filling the syringe. Mercy stopped in mid-filling and looked at the file next to her, realizing that nurse Olafson was right.

“Oh...” she said defeatedly. “Thank you for catching that.”

The nurse, a good-natured, middle-aged woman with kind, round eyes and a mess of curly hair that was always in a ponytail, smiled and held out her hands. "Let me. You seem a little distracted today, Dr. Ziegler."

Mercy could not quite deny it - it was, after all, her third little mistake that day. She sighed, leaned back against the wall and let the nurse handle the injection.

"So, what's eating you up so much?" the nurse asked casually.

"A date that isn't a date," she replied, shaking her head. "I only wished it was."

"Ahh.." nurse Olafson replied knowingly. "Those kind of dates." They left the patient's room together, though Mercy could not stop herself from taking one last look at the poor fellow. He was out cold and there was only so much hope he would wake anytime soon. She had tried her best, as always, and she wished she had access to the budget needed to restore the man's arm, but without any certainty that he would wake up to use it, this would have to wait.

Outside, the kind nurse stopped her. "So, has some fool rejected you, Dr. Ziegler?" There was a good-hearted tone in her voice. "Because then I might have to go and have a word with them!"

Mercy smiled at so much warm kindness. "No... I am going out to eat with a ...friend."

The nurse raised a knowing eyebrow. "You know they can't answer if you don't tell them, right?"

Mercy shook her head. "It is more complicated than that. Far more. I am not sure outright asking is a smart option and I am not very hopeful, either." She sighed, crossing her arms. "Imagine you wanted to go out with Steven from the pediatric ward. It's that level of complicated."

"That, you have to explain to me, Dr. Ziegler. I don't think Steven is out of the picture for either me or you."

"But I know you have known him since he was little, you said, and taught him a lot of what he knows. It seems to me, no matter how close in age you might be, he is from a whole different generation. And... you probably know nothing of what he likes in a partner, I suppose?" She stopped herself, realizing only now what she sounded like. "Not that I am interested in Steven or anyone from the hospital. I just-- I can't--" She hesitated again, stuffing her hands into her lab-coat pocket. She could not possibly tell anyone that in her free time, she was working with a regrouped Overwatch which, according to the Petras Act, was highly illegal... and that Fareeha had only turned up again because of that.

"Doc, I don't care who it is. But I will tell you one thing," nurse Olafson replied with all the seriousness of a mother. "Dinners are used to find out about all the things you don't know about a person. And if I were taking Steven out to dinner, I'd show myself from my best side to remind him that I am no longer his mentor, but his colleague. It would be my job to show him that we are on the same level now, aye?"

"On the same level...!" Mercy echoed, not quite believing it. If she thought about it, despite knowing the same people and both being in the same organization, she had little in common with Pharah in the first place. Pharah was dedicated to fighting, Mercy was dedicated to peace. Pharah was down to earth and needed little to feel satisfied, like the soldier she was, while Mercy was always looking for the small details that made her surroundings more beautiful. Pharah was practical and efficient - she had only brought a sturdy backpack to Mercy's place with just the clothes she needed, a few survival items and one notebook with two pictures in it. Within moments, all of those possession had been set out neatly on a shelf, perfectly folded, sorted and clean. She had needed exactly one mug, one knife and one plate at Mercy's place - and in that

respect she had chosen the plainest and most sturdy items that Mercy possessed. The blanket in the guestroom was always folded to absolute neatness when not in use, as was Mercy's sofa blanket when she came home. Meanwhile, Mercy tossed her used clothes onto her bedroom chair, left all cleaning up for the next morning and had whole boards pinned with postcards, photos, coupons, used tickets and other memories.

With whatever Pharah did, washing clothes or dishes, even reading with a cup of tea or taking notes, she needed very little space. Her handwriting was small, her things were always set out close to her. For example, the bottle of water on the bedside table had been right next to the glass, her pen and the notebook neatly laid out next to the water and a photo and her cellphone leaned against the wall behind it - altogether taking up a space smaller than a printed magazine.

Despite having a cold, she only ever had one pack of tissues on that night stand, neatly laid out next to the pen. Mercy did not understand whether being a travelling security person or a former member of the Egyptian army had made her that way. She knew that most recruits in the fields - at least those she had bandaged up in various places - only had so many possessions they could bring and that they been drilled into keeping these things safe, clean, tidy and always ready to pack up quickly and move on. Pharah incorporated that spirit.

Meanwhile, Mercy had trinkets that had some meaning to her everywhere, made sure everything she had was decorated in matching tones and styles and she spread everything she had out to give the illusion of open spaces and much room. She needed the entire counter to cook and her bed was filled with ten different pillows - all dressed in the same colors, but of different sizes and fluffiness. Not to mention a stuffed rabbit, a stack of books by the night stand, two alarm clocks, a loose charging cable for her cellphone, several pictures in frames and a loose collection of hair ties.

There were of course way more differences between them than that. They looked completely different, for starters, they did not like the same movies much, and from what Mercy could tell, Pharah's showers were way hotter and shorter than Mercy's. Pharah ate slowly, Mercy rushed it, Pharah stayed calm at anything disturbing - like that one time Mercy's dishwasher had started making a disturbing clanking sounds - and Mercy freaked out.

Mercy could not stand dim lights, Pharah found them comfortable. Pharah enjoyed the history channel which bored Mercy to tears and Mercy enjoyed criminal investigation shows that frustrated Pharah for their lack of realism.

And yet.

That moment in the mornings when Pharah, no matter how bad her cold was, stepped out of the bathroom, dutifully dressed and with her hair still wet ... Mercy had always stopped in her tracks, if she caught a glimpse of it.

And yet.

When Pharah was making tea, no matter how often she had made the same tea, she would grab the little package around the tea bag with two hands and read the instructions before carefully opening it, then discarding the wrapper and then tie the little string loosely around the handle of the mug so it wouldn't fall into it. Only then would she fill in the boiled water, always careful not to directly hit the tea bag, as if that could destroy it. Mercy did not know whether she had learned that almost ritualistic appreciation for tea from her mother, but she seemed so comfortable doing it that way, like it never occurred to her to do it differently. And there were more such little things and oddities that were both fascinating and beautiful. The way she smoothed her bangs, the perfect slices of cut vegetables she could produce, the low tone in which she would speak her agreement in conversation. Mercy could have gone on swooning forever.

And then there was passion and dedication in her - and that almost too young hopefulness that she would achieve more in this life - have more impact, change the world a little for the better. Her unwillingness to let any pain get to her, but fight against any urges to give in, were admirable. Mercy had seen Zarya and Pharah try a few close-combat tricks on each other and they both had met any punch with a half-aggressive grunt and just continued, ignoring any bruises and pain.

Were they, Mercy and Pharah, on the same level? Were they even part of the same universe anymore? What did Mercy's world of Nervus medianus and Vena cephalica have in common with Captain Pharah's world of military terms and operating strategies? What did Mercy's critical position as an old member of Overwatch have in common with Pharah's juvenile feeling of excitement to be part of this group. What did Mercy's settled life of hospital shifts, interspersed with the duties of a battlefield medic have to do with Pharah camping out in a dorm with other young people, free as bird, always ready to deploy on a mission for Helix or 'Overwatch'?

In every respect, Mercy had set her heart on the wrong person and that Pharah was the daughter - the little kid - of someone Mercy had worked so closely with did not help.

"Excuse me. I am looking for Dr. Ziegler?" Pharah stood at the information desk, having never been to the hospital where Mercy was spending most of her time.

"The surgeons can only be called out of duty by the attending nurses or current residents. If you have an emergency, please have a seat, we will be with you shortly." The answer was grumpy and curt.

"Oh, sorry, I meant to say, I think her shift is ending and she asked me to pick her up. I can wait outside, but could you just let her know I am here?"

The woman gave her a very suspicious look as she picked up the telephone. "Name?" she asked with much skepticism. Surely, she was expecting that it would not ring a bell with 'Dr. Ziegler', if she called her now.

"Fareeha Amari. Pharah."

"What now? Amari or Pharah?" Fareeha senses some impatience here.

"Pharah."

The woman pressed her lips together and pushed a button on her telephone. As she was waiting for someone to pick up on the other end, her expression of disbelief in Pharah's story did not change even one bit.

"There is a 'Miss Pharah' here for Dr. Ziegler." There was a pause. "Mh-mh...!" Suspicion got replaced by displeasure as the woman hung up. "Dr. Ziegler will be delayed by 20 minutes. She is asking me to apologize for letting you wait."

Pharah smiled, feeling a tinge of satisfaction that this woman who had not believed her was now forced to apologize to her. "That is fine. I am in no hurry. I'll stay here." She walked over to the waiting area and sat down, looking around.

It should be weird Mercy could be working in such a drab place. When Pharah was a child, Mercy had always seemed so incredibly special and amazing - someone who would only work in the best and modern hospitals with state of the art equipment and so on. She was, after all, a prodigy. But this place was ... square-shaped and gray and kind of dark. Pharah was well aware

that the exterior might not say too much about the expertise and the equipment beyond the heavy doors. And surely, Mercy was now working so close to the main base on purpose.

Yet, it just did not seem glorious enough for someone as skilled as Mercy. But then, weren't all hospitals like that, all the time? They were meant for function, not beauty. Pharah wondered why that bothered her so much - she had spent her fair share sleeping in tents with only cold water and no solid walls anywhere near her. A dreary place should generally not bother her. But she figured it was a bit of a ... disappointment that she felt in Mercy's place. The woman with her incredible intelligence and skill just seemed to deserve better.

Or maybe she was just bitter about that receptionist person. Everyone working around someone as kind as Angela should probably not have such a bitter attitude.

It took Mercy almost 30 minutes to barge through the doors to the neurosurgery wing, wisely out of her lab coat because that would have made her recognizable as a medic to any patient with a question wandering the hallways - and not given her much freedom to get where she wanted to be - which was in the lobby, where Pharah was waiting.

"I am so incredibly sorry. We had an emergency earlier so everything else got delayed and-- I rushed, but there is only so much I can delegate to other people and so much I can do myself at once."

Pharah got up with a smile. "It's fine, Mercy. You're head surgeon and I believe people don't plan on getting sick or injured. And from my experience, hospitals are always understaffed. I completely understand."

"I really tried to get done in time!" The young doctor took a shallow, stressed breath.

Pharah gave her a gentle hug with one arm. "Breathe. I'm fine and I called the restaurant and our table is still reserved. There is no problem whatsoever, okay?"

That seemed to get Mercy closer to the right mindset. She hugged Pharah back, even though the sudden touch surprised her and made her heart leap in her chest. Pharah was right, though - it seemed that everything was okay and that maybe she could focus on what was ahead of them right now, instead of dwelling on the hospital-stress she was just about to leave behind for the day.

"Thanks. I needed that," she admitted.

"Anytime," Pharah replied with that ever-present smile in her voice that made Mercy's stomach form tiny little knots.

"So, is this the best Italian restaurant, ever?" Pharah asked, watching Mercy bite into her pizza whole-heartedly. Mercy chewed and swallowed with a content look on her face.

"It may just be. Or I may just be really hungry and dry rice would easily have been the best thing in the world right now," she replied, making Pharah smile at her.

"Since when have you been working today, anyway?"

"Eight," she replied quickly before taking another hungry bite, chewed it quickly and then frowned. "Sorry... I am eating like a pig. I only had a sandwich for lunch," she apologized.

"You're not," Pharah assured her, "but I have never heard of anyone skip lunch as much as you do - and I haven't even been here for that long. But you were always really hungry coming

home.”

“Hey, you never noticed when you were thirteen,” Mercy teased. “I didn’t have much time to eat regularly then, either. I guess it’s just part of my life.”

Pharah shook her head. “I was a little concerned with teenage things at the time. I don’t think any child would have noticed. I probably would have forgotten to eat, if mom hadn’t made sure of that.”

Mercy laughed. “Whenever she could, she made sure that I would eat well, too.”

“I know!” There was excitement in Fareeha’s voice. “Half the time, it was like you were my big sister. I bet she wanted me to look up to you to influence my path.”

The slap in the face was more harsh than Mercy would have wanted to admit. A sister. It was so annoyingly far from what her irrational mind wanted from Pharah and yet, that was probably the most likely thing Pharah still saw in her.

“Unlikely,” Mercy replied. “I was in Overwatch after all and she wanted to get you off that idea.”

“Hm... I don’t know,” Pharah mused. “Somehow, being in Overwatch was sort of you ‘other thing’. You always were a doctor first. But mom’s efforts were pointless in that respect anyway.” Pharah pierced some pasta onto her fork, looking at her plate and blushing just the faintest bit. “I was looking up to you anyway and would never have stopped wanting to be in Overwatch.”

Mercy caught the blush, the tiny, embarrassed smile and her heart only sank further. A sister to look up to, an admired hero - certainly not on the same level. She sure was blushing because she still attached some sort of celebrity status to Mercy and it had nothing to do with romantic interest. Well, that was something for the diary.

“You realize I do have tons of bad sides, right?” she blurted out as if ready to argue herself off that pedestal that Pharah had put her on by laying all her bad sides bare. She thought of her conversation with nurse Olafson at the hospital earlier that day and how she had told her to advertise for herself at the dinner. And here she was now, about ready to point out that she didn’t unload the dishwasher for days, could get annoyingly impatient and had a seriously unhealthy addiction to coffee and Swiss chocolate.

Pharah grinned. “Oh, I do know that.” She leaned over her plate, her fork dangling in the air. “Are you still like that, anyway?”

“Wait - what? Which of my flaws are you referring to exactly?” Mercy replied.

“I mean the shameless test-wise flirting with everyone who shows even the slightest interest? My impression was always that it was easy for anyone to grab your interest but that most of them did not make it past round one.” She narrowed her eyes, thinking. “I think anyone who just took you for a meal or the movies didn’t stand a chance. People who grabbed you for a wine tasting, a hike or a charity mission had much better chances.”

“What, Pharah?” Mercy replied with big eyes, though ultimately she realized that the young Egyptian was not wrong about her assessment of how she had conducted herself nearly 20 years ago. “How closely did you observe me?!”

Pharah chuckled with much amusement, diving her fork back in. “Sorry. I was just amazed by your popularity. I think there were days when I wished I was blond, too.”

Mercy snorted. “Do you have any idea how many children grabbed, pulled and messed up my

hair in places where that hair color is really uncommon? You'd rethink that." Not to mention that Pharah's shiny, smooth, dark hair was gorgeous. "And yes, I did try to figure out whether anyone asking me out was actually interested in me and smart enough to make an effort, or whether they were just into that young blond doctor from Overwatch, thank you very much."

Pharah actually giggled at that. "Sorry, Mercy. I was going a little too far there, I think. You just seemed to have it all. Overwatch, everyone looking up to you and tons of suitors. And when I asked the girl from the neighbourhood out for a date, all I got was a slap in the face and then I really wanted to figure out why you were so much better at this."

At that moment, there was another little twist in Mercy's stomach to the point where she had to put her fork down because she could not take another bite right away. She covered her face by drinking a slow, long sip of her wine, processing the information that Fareeha Amari did indeed have her eye on other women... only to follow that information up by the reminder that Pharah made a very clear impression that those other women did not include a certain Angela Ziegler.

Mercy cleared her throat. "I am not like that anymore," she clarified and it sounded much more like she felt insulted than she had wanted to sound. "I mean... it was a learning curve - to understand who is genuine and who is just attracted."

"Not like that anymore?" Pharah echoed with a smile. "How then, did I get your business card so quickly?"

Mercy coughed. "Genji made me do it."

"Uh-huh." Pharah thought about this. "Well, you were the proactive party in this case, I give you that. It used to be the other way round. I am not even sure you ever asked anyone out before the asked you."

Mercy laughed, really wanting to turn the conversation off that topic. "I don't understand why we are talking about my 20 year old romantic escapades. It feels like a long time ago."

"Sorry," Pharah repeated. "Just lately, for obvious reasons, I've been thinking about that time a lot. It does feel long ago and so much has happened since then."

Mercy smiled. "Indeed. I mean, there used to be this child who wouldn't let her mother put on a band aid for a tiny scratch, but would obediently hold still if I did it - and suddenly I am in front of a determined woman who can pilot one of the most complicated suits ever invented that I literally did not recognize." She put her fork down and leaned her chin on her folded hands. "What happened to you, Fareeha Amari?"

From there the conversation went a less awkward way as Pharah related her past to Mercy - all about the name she had gained, the training and her work for Helix security, up to her promotion to Captain and of course to Tracer's call shortly after Winston had initiated the Overwatch recall.

The doorbell rang. "Oh goodness, are we being too loud?" Mei worried immediately, thinking the neighbours were going to complain.

"No way!" D.va replied immediately. "It's just a bit of music and talking!"

"I'll go get it," Zarya volunteered and put her drink down, slipping her arm out from behind Mei and making her way to the corridor. She was surprised to find they actually had a visitor. "Mercy in the flesh!" she laughed. "Come in, have a drink, make yourself at home."

Mercy stepped in upon the invitation, her apology for intruding stuck in her throat thanks to that immediate, warm welcome from Zarya. She slipped out of her coat and followed Zarya into the living room where she was fitted with a drink so quickly, she did not even know when Zarya had poured it.

“Oh, hey, Mercy!” D.va greeted. “What brings you here?”

She had hesitated and rolled the thought over in her head so much concerning this uninvited visit. And now, somehow, she felt twice as embarrassed standing here and being asked for an explanation. Pharah came to her rescue.

“I told her she could stop by anytime she wanted, if she needed company,” she clarified.

Mercy sat down on a chair and nodded. “I had a long day. I thought I could use some friendly faces,” she added with a smile.

“Ahh! That’s the spirit!” Zarya thundered, raising her glass after plopping down next to Mei again.

“You seem tired,” Mei observed empathically.

“I am...” Mercy admitted. It was another reason she had been close to rethinking her decision to come here. But the thought of going to her silent apartment all alone with the images of the day burned into her head had seemed even more dreadful. She sent Mei a sad smile. “It wasn’t such a good day at the hospital.”

“We’ll make you feel better,” Pharah promised. “We were just discussing whether or not D.va should accept a gig in Hollywood for some ridiculous alien invasion movie.”

“I thought we had agreed it was not ridiculous,” Zarya protested, casually slipping her large arm around the backrest on Mei’s side. Mei let her, but did not react to it. There was not much room on that sofa, anyway. Somehow, instead of having a large sofa that would easily have fitted into the living room, the four of them had a rumpled-looking, small two-seater and three arm chairs. Mercy really felt like she had barged into a dorm room and intruded upon people way below her age, even though except for D.va, they weren’t. But she had often felt misplaced within her own age group before - she had just advanced her career too quickly and never felt like eighteen or twenty-four when she had been that age.

This moment was still exactly what she needed - silly, amused conversation, a glass of coke with something in it - all of it much better than reflecting again and again how she had started sweating and panting doing 20 minutes of CPR... and lost anyway.

“What are we going to do with Mercy?” Mei wondered, picking up the glasses onto a tray to take them to the kitchen. The doctor had fallen asleep on her arm chair after not even finishing her first drink. “Should we wake her and have someone take her home?”

“She looks exhausted,” Pharah replied. “Maybe we should just let her sleep.”

“She can’t sleep on the arm chair or the sofa, though - I mean, that cannot be comfortable throughout the night,” D.va decided.

“Yes,” Mei agreed. “She is going to wake up with all of us asleep and be at a loss as to what to do, possibly run out into the night to get home.” She looked at the two-seater. “I’m small... we can just put Mercy in my bed.”

“Oh, Mei, don’t,” Zarya protested. “You know it’s broken on the left side. You’ll get a back ache.” She looked the small scientist up and down. “You can sleep in my bed, though.”

Mei shook her head at Zarya, grinning bemusedly. “You wish!”

“I do!” Zarya replied confidently. “You know you are stabbing my poor heart, right?” Apparently her strategy was to wear Mei down until the woman would give in already out of sheer annoyance.

Pharah felt she had no wits for their little game right now and interrupted them with the problem at hand: “Anyone have an air mattress or anything?” All Pharah received in reply to her question was an apologetic shrug from D.va. Then she made a decision. “Never mind. I’ve known her since I was ten, just take her to my bed. We’ll be fine.”

Mei smiled and nodded, glad they had found a solution. “I have an extra pillow and blanket. This should work. And she can sleep as much as she wants to... she did say she had her free day tomorrow, right?”

“Right,” Zarya confirmed and carefully slipped her large arms under Mercy’s legs and behind her neck. Mercy stirred being lifted like that, her eyes opening just a little.

“What time is it?” she mumbled.

“Sleep time. It’s all good, we have a bed for you,” Pharah replied as she followed Zarya to her bedroom. Pharah switched the dim bedside lamp on and let Zarya place the tired doctor on the bed.

“I should go home...” Mercy mumbled.

“Mmmh... sure,” Pharah replied with a smile. “Just take a nap first, you seem tired.”

“Okay...!”

Mei came in with a blanket and a pillow and they did their best to make Mercy comfortable. She was already half asleep again.

“Honestly... do you think we should undress her?” Mei wondered. “Those jeans are looking tight and are probably part of her hospital outfit.” She was right, of course. Not too many people wore white jeans in their free time and while they were clean, Mei was right when she said they did not look too comfortable.

“I’ll take care of it,” Pharah promised. Mercy did not need four people undressing her, after all. So she shooed everyone out of the room and carefully dressed Mercy down until she was just in her shirt and undies and bra. Mercy wasn’t awake enough to be truly helpful, though she did cooperate a little in her sleepiness.

Pharah then got a glass and bottle of water to put next to Mercy’s side of the bed and got herself ready for sleep. She was dead tired herself and used to sleeping with little room. Having Mercy there did not bother her at all. She was rather glad she could finally return the favor for housing her during her cold in a better way than just taking her out to dinner.

Mercy awoke in the middle of the night, disoriented and confused, in an unfamiliar room with someone sleeping next to her. Bits and pieces of the previous night were coming back to her - the

conversation, the overwhelming tiredness and the comfortable armchair she had been on.

A faint memory of being carried was there, too. She had an urge to find a bathroom, so she carefully sat up. Her feet bumped against a bottle and nearly toppled it over. Water. Was that for her?

She got up and once she was in the corridor she finally recognized the place - it was that apartment that Zarya, Mei, D.va and Pharah shared. That made it a lot easier to find the bathroom and as she moved on, her head started to clear a little. She had evidently fallen asleep during the little evening party and never been sent home. She also had lost her pants and sweater somehow.

She tiredly went back to the corridor and to the room she had come from. On a chair in the corner, glowing white in the bit of light from the window, she spotted her pants, folded with military precision. On the night stand, by the window, she saw a lamp, a glass, a bottle, a photo, a notebook, a pen and a cellphone taking up less room than a magazine.

Finally, it came to her whose room she was in and who was sleeping in the bed next to her and a rush of adrenaline ran right through her, waking her more than she wanted to be awake at this hour.

Fareeha was sleeping with her back turned towards Mercy, under her own blanket and with one hand hanging down over the edge of the bed. She was looking so peaceful and relaxed. Mercy slowly sat back down on the bed to not wake her and made use of the offered water someone had put on the floor for her, wondering how she was going to continue sleeping with Pharah so close.

The kindness did not escape her - they could have woken her and asked her to go home, or left her in the chair or on the sofa. But these people were all nicer than that and apparently, Pharah had sacrificed part of her space for Mercy.

She slowly laid back down on her bed and stared at the ceiling. Pharah's breath was calm, even and soothing. She turned to stare at the back of the young woman's head, her fingers reaching out just a little to touch the bit of hair that had fallen onto the pillow behind Pharah. It was pathetic and maybe slightly creepy to do that, but she could not stop herself. Her hair was soft and smooth, just as Mercy had always imagined it.

"No, come on! I was 19!" Zarya protested. "I did not know what I wanted!"

"I'm 19 and I know what I want," D.va retorted nonchalantly. "I don't think I can accept that excuse."

Zarya shrugged. "So you're smarter than I was. It took me a while and a bit of testing, okay?"

Pharah pointed her fork at the pink-haired Russian. "I'm sorry, but nobody in their right mind comes up with the idea of 'testing' what it is like to be with twins. I think you were way out of the testing ground there." She teased, amused by Zarya's escapades. "Plus, I have no idea how that would help anyone figure out what they want."

"Well, I figured out I don't want that," Zarya defended.

"Oh? And what do you want, Zarya?" D.va teased.

"Freedom for Russia, a weight lifting record and," she grinned across the table to the short scientist, "Mei."

Mei just bit into her carrot, seeming unimpressed - and Zarya pouted.

At that moment, the door opened and a groggy looking Mercy entered the kitchen.

“Oh, hi there, sleeping beauty!” Hana waved when she spotted her. “Feeling better?”

Mercy sighed. “Lots. Thank you... and sorry for falling asleep.”

“All good,” Pharah assured her. “Have a seat and have some breakfast.”

Mercy took an empty chair and looked across the table. “That is the oddest breakfast I have ever seen,” she commented. Literally everyone at the table was eating something different. Mei was indulging herself in a huge heap of raw vegetables, Zarya had some eggs and small sausages, Pharah was dunking some kind of bread into a sauce and occasionally popping a falafel into her mouth and D.va was enjoying a bowl of rice with what seemed to be kimchi.

Pharah laughed. “We tried to share breakfast for about a week and nobody was happy. Zarya’s was too greasy, Mei’s too healthy, D.va’s was too spicy and mine too heavy.”

“But now you have all the choices in the world,” Mei laughed. “What would you like?”

Mercy was eyeing the falafel and the bread, so Pharah grabbed the Swiss woman’s plate and put part of her breakfast onto it. “Pharah, not so much - I don’t want to steal all your breakfast. I can try everyone else’s too!”

Soon, Mercy found herself fitted with the oddest, most mismatched breakfast, ever. She had kimchi, veggies, sausages, juice, falafel, bread and half a fried egg. All of it was very tasty, though, and she was repeatedly asked to crown the best breakfast - which was a question she could not answer, so she laughed: “Swiss, of course. Bread, cheese, veggies, croissants and jam...!”

A collective sigh of disappointment echoed across the table. “We should have known,” Pharah commented with fake exasperation.

Mercy leaned back in the chair, staring at the calendar on the wall. The nurses always made sure it was up to date so people could rely on it for the paper work. It was February 14th.

In Mercy’s hand was a package of fine Swiss chocolate. She was holding it by the edges and turning it around and around, thinking, wondering. She had already sent some to Genji two days ago, well aware that per Japanese tradition, anyone who meant anything to you deserved a bit of chocolate. They had even made it a tradition to return a little chocolatey gift in thanks on White Day, but Mercy assumed that Genji just wanted more reason to get Swiss chocolate as that was, and always had been, the best. Mercy did not mind - in return, she always got something phenomenally artful. Somehow, Genji managed to find places that turned chocolate into beautiful and cute little sculptures and ornaments. She had never seen likewise and every year, she was looking forward to what kind of creation he had picked out for her this time.

This package was not for Genji though. At this point, it was for no one because Mercy could not bring herself to think of giving it away. Chances were she would not even see Pharah today. Supposedly she had just returned from Egypt after a mission for Helix and maybe she needed rest or was busy on other ends.

And what would Pharah make of it, anyway? Mercy looked at the white cross on red ground and the description on the back - French and German and in smaller print Dutch and Italian. She

wished she had bought German or French chocolate instead - at least then she could have given it away anonymously, but within Overwatch and among all the people that Pharah probably knew, this flag and language was almost a signature.

She put the chocolate on the table and peeled herself out of her labcoat. Her shift had ended ten minutes ago and it was no good to be a doctor and hang around. She'd be sucked into work in no time if things got stressful in the wing. She decided to take a walk to clear her head. She always loved the shop windows on Valentine's Day. Everything was so colorful and celebrating something so undoubtedly good in a world that was so shaken at this time.

The cafés were filled with happy and hopeful couples - so many people sitting together in pairs of two, dressed up and with flowers in the vases between them. It was beautiful to watch and always had been - whether Mercy had been lonely or in a relationship herself - or even now when she was longing for someone she was not going to have.

What if she just got everyone chocolate? Then maybe giving something special to Fareeha would not make that much of a fuss? She'd just get a little more than the others and could make of it what she wanted.

"Oh, hello, Mercy!" a voice said behind her. She turned and looked right into Mei's eyes - wrapped in a thick scarf, her cheeks puffy from the cold. She must have been out for a while.

"What a coincidence!" Mercy replied cheerfully. "And there I thought everyone was out of town today!"

"Hana is, in fact. But no, everyone else is in - Fareeha came back yesterday and I have been here since last week. Zarya will not leave until the 20th," Mei updated her.

"Does that mean you having another one of your evening parties today - with so many people actually there? It's rare, right?"

Mei grinned guiltily, her cheek reddening maybe a bit more. "No, not today. Zarya basically threw Pharah out."

"What?!" Mercy replied in complete shock.

"No, no!" Mei reacted immediately. "Not that kind of throwing out. She just wanted her out of the apartment for our date, so she pretty much got her a restaurant coupon for 'Sweet Joe's' and told her to leave."

"Wait, wait, wait! You are having a date with Zarya? Has she finally won?"

Mei shrugged. "Not yet. But it's really flattering to see her try so hard."

"Mei, you are cruel," Mercy teased her.

"Maybe," Mei admitted, "but just blatantly telling me she wants us to be together was not going to roll with me. A girl needs to be won over, right?"

Maybe Mei was right. Maybe a girl did need to be won over. "You are absolutely right!" she agreed. "Well, I have to head on, still have some errands to run. Have fun at your date tonight."

"Thank you! Have a nice evening."

So Mercy turned the corner and headed straight for Sweet Joe's.

As predicted, Pharah was inside the restaurant at a table, studying the menu. Surely she did not want to eat alone? And since Pharah could be seen from the window, the coincidence excuse was pretty safe.

Mercy opened the door and made her way straight to Pharah's table. "Pharah! I saw you from outside - I did not know you were back!" she lied.

Pharah smiled up at her. "Oh, yes. Since yesterday," she replied. "I thought I had mentioned it, but maybe I didn't."

There was a momentary pause and Mercy desperately looked for something to say. "Oh, you should try this place's ribs - they are superb," she said eventually not daring to just take a seat. "And I wasn't going to intrude for long... but..." she dug in her handbag, "I got you something."

Pharah looked at her curiously, waiting for Mercy to find what she was digging for. She eventually pulled a small, square package with a little pink ribbon tied around it from the handbag and handed it over. "Swiss chocolate. It's the absolute best," Mercy explained.

"Oh... thank you...!" Pharah replied, a little confused. The fact that it was Valentine's Day did not escape her - but did that even mean anything? Maybe Mercy had recently been to Switzerland and been able to pick some up for people and this was the first time they had met in a while. But then, what was with that pink bow? "It looks delicious," she added. "It will almost be too precious to eat it."

"Please do eat it, though," Mercy smiled, her cheeks a little red. "It's best at room temperature and... well, before it expires," she smirked. Pharah was still trying to discern what to make of this. Mercy wouldn't... would she? No, that was impossible - that woman had once patched up her scraped knees and even once braided her hair. There was just no way.

"Okay, I will heed that advice," Pharah acknowledged. "And... thanks again. I don't think I have ever gotten chocolate from anyone. And such good chocolate on top of that."

Mercy beamed at her. "Well,... some days, great people deserve to be given a gift or two."

Woah, what? Some days? Did she mean today in particular? But Pharah had no time to dwell on that because at that moment, a young woman joined their table, a coat draped over her arm. "Sorry, Fareeha - the bathroom was unusually crowded and I really --- oh. Hello," she said, spotting Mercy.

"Samantha, this is Mercy. I know her through missions, even though her main occupation is neurosurgery." She gestured at Mercy, then at the woman. "And this is Samantha. We met at the gym two weeks ago."

Samantha shook Mercy's hand and then took the seat opposite of Pharah. Mercy's heart felt like it wanted to burst into a million pieces. "Nice to meet you - I had no idea I was intruding on something here!" she added quickly. "I'll be on my way!" She felt sick. In all her mulling, all her calculations, hopes and thoughts, she had never even once considered that Pharah might find or already be with someone else. What a grave mistake!

"Okay - it was nice--" Pharah tried, but Mercy had already turned and was walking to the door, leaving a worried little knot in Pharah's stomach. She was still holding the chocolate, and, realizing that Samantha had not yet noticed it, let it slip into her bag under the table.

Pharah put her jacket onto the hook and tossed her key into the bowl by the door. Mei's and Zarya's keys were in there as well, so she called out: "Hey you, two. I'm just heading to my room, okay?"

"Oh, come in," Zarya called from the kitchen. "You're not intruding."

Pharah poked her head into the kitchen where the remains of Mei and Zarya's Valentine's dinner, including candles and flowers, was still on the table, though both women looked sufficiently stuffed. Zarya was leaned back in her chair and Mei in her seat was waving at Pharah with a smile.

"Hm," Pharah observed. "Not so lucky today, Zarya?"

"Somewhat lucky," she corrected. "Apparently I deserve kisses now." She sent a smirky glance at Mei.

"In moderation," Mei clarified.

"You two are the oddest sort-of-couple I have ever met," Pharah laughed.

"What about you? Had a good time with Sam?" Mei wondered.

Pharah sighed. "Yes, I did. But -" She held out the chocolate. "Something happened that I can't quite make sense of."

"You can't make sense of chocolate on Valentine's Day?" Mei asked. "And you are calling us odd. I would think that she means to say she likes you."

"It's not from Sam. It's from Mercy," Pharah corrected them. "She found me at the restaurant and gave me this - and when Sam came back from the bathroom, Mercy ...pretty much... ran."

"Oh...!" Mei and Zarya exhaled at the same time. Mei took the chocolate and looked at it - the label, the name, the pink ribbon around it.

"See, now you are as confused as I am," Pharah observed. "I mean - she's known me since I was nine or ten or so. This does not make any sense, does it?"

Mei frowned. "It doesn't? Didn't you say she flirted with you on the first day at the base?"

Pharah realized that she had almost forgotten all about that. "But then she did not know who I was," she argued. "She was super-embarrassed when she found out. I mean - she used to yell at me for peeling at my scabs!"

"Uhm.. Pharah... no offense, but... you are not that child anymore. And if she found you attractive without knowing who you were, imagine how confused she must be now, if she is still interested in you."

Zarya took the chocolate, inspecting it as well, smoothing her hand over the ribbon that was a little lighter than her nail polish. She then handed it back to Mei. "See, that's why I told you I wanted you right away. So you wouldn't even come up with the idea of going out with anyone else."

"I think I am going to have to revoke your kissing privileges," Mei replied

"No! Come on! I worked hard on those!"

Pharah flopped down on a chair at the table. "What am I going to do?"

“Depends on what you want, right?” Mei suggested.

“I don’t know. This has never even occurred to me.” She ran a hand through her hair.

“Well, if you are not interested in her, you could just tell her, I suppose. Not the most pleasant experience, but she might just move on,” Mei suggested.

“That totally worked for you, right?” Zarya smirked.

Mei gave her a long, analytical look. “I think kissing is off.”

“Mei!” There was some pleading in Zarya’s voice. She leaned over to kiss Mei on the cheek, but the little woman laid a soft hand on Zarya’s face and pushed her away, causing Zarya to give her the look of a rejected puppy.

Pharah smiled and got up - she was obviously intruding here and she had a lot to think about.

Whenever Mercy thought about that moment when she had given Pharah that wrapped chocolate, her skin prickled hot and cold at the same time. She could not remember, but there had probably been a glass on Samantha’s side of the table or a bag - something to indicate that Pharah was not alone and she had just overlooked it and made herself look like a fool.

On top of that, this meant Pharah was pursuing other people and most likely already with someone. And it felt dreadful knowing that. In retrospect this was not unlikely, even if Mercy had never considered it. Pharah was attractive and had every right to try and find a partner. But it still hurt.

And with that ache in her pocket, Mercy went to work, to the base, to her lonely apartment and tried to cope. She tried to remind herself how different Pharah was from her - the military neatness, her scarce needs, self-sufficient character and love of combat. It did not help. None of these were actual flaws - just parts where she and Pharah differed. And then, there was still a part in Mercy’s brain that clung to Pharah’s smile and her laughter, to her forgiving and ultimately kind nature, to her sense of duty and inherent calmness in almost any situation.

When she first met Pharah after that incident, she felt stiff and awkward and incredibly stupid. They did not have time to talk as they were just in a meeting together and Mercy did her best to disappear extremely quickly afterwards, claiming that she had a shift at the hospital which she actually did not.

She knew herself that her behavior was ridiculous. After all she had only given Pharah some chocolate and all she would have to do was claim that the chocolate had been given for not specific reason other than to make Pharah try the best chocolate in the world.

But that was another problem in Mercy’s character: She could not lie. She tried, in front of a mirror, and imagined telling Pharah about the insignificance of that chocolate, but even when she managed to push the words out, they sounded obviously fake and insecure. Maybe that was the whole problem: She could not take it back. And so she avoided Pharah because she did not know how to cope with this otherwise.

She took every extra shift at the hospital she could get, laid down in the little bedroom at the facility, taking multiple stand-by shifts that allowed her to sleep there until she was needed for an emergency. It was better than sleeping at home. Her apartment felt empty and cold and she could not walk past her own guest room without feeling a pressure on her chest like she was about to

cry.

Pharah was too alert of her surroundings to miss this change in behavior. If she had even considered doubting Mei and Zarya's assessment about the meaning of this chocolate, she could no longer ignore that Mercy was very actively avoiding her. And that, too, hurt. Because they had gotten along well and now that was all gone. She had stopped by at her group's dorm-like apartment before when she had felt down, just to make her feel better. Now, according to D.va, Zarya and Mei she would not even do that, even when Pharah wasn't at the apartment.

Above and beyond, because Mei, D.va, Zarya and even the former Overwatch members saw less of Mercy, too, it felt a little like she, Pharah, had unintentionally ruined everyone's lives. So while she was not aware of what she should do, she knew that this had to end.

She tried calling Mercy repeatedly, but there was no response. After the tenth time, she decided to knock on Mei's door across the hall.

"Mei... I need to do something about Mercy, but she won't answer my calls." She leaned against the door frame. "Can you just call her and find out where she is so I can find her?"

Mei nodded with a pitiful little expression and dialled Mercy's number on her cellphone. Mercy picked up within moments, much to Pharah's annoyance.

"Hi, Mercy!" Mei said cheerfully. "It's the first sunny day of the year - would you want to come for some ice cream with me?" Pharah waited as Mei listened to Mercy's response. "A double shift? Really? What if it is still sunny tomorrow? I've not seen much of you lately and I have one or two news to share with you. Will you come?"

Again, there was a waiting period.

"Awesome!" Mei said eventually. "I will call you again tomorrow and we can decide where to go. See you!" She hung up and looked at Pharah with a distinct "mission accomplished" face.

"So, do you want to go for ice cream with her in my stead?"

Pharah frowned. "She is going to see me and run. No, I need to corner her. Right now, at the hospital, I think."

"Good. It seems to me her current shift ends at eight and her next one starts at nine. At least that's what it sounded like."

"You'd better come up with some news to tell her over your ice cream, though," Pharah replied apologetically.

"Oh, I do have news, in fact," Mei smirked.

"Did you finally buy a leash for Zarya?" Pharah snorted.

"Something of that sort. But don't tell Zarya. She does not know yet."

"Ma'am you cannot go in there without authorization," the unfriendly front desk nurse said as Pharah tried to enter the neurosurgical wing. She could have guessed. She put up a bright smile and pulled out her business card, making sure it showed the English side, not the Arabic one, as she handed it over.

“Fareeha Amari, Helix security. I understand that there is a patient here who needs a bodyguard.” The lie came easily to such a nasty person. “I have been ordered to protect them.”

“I know of no such thing. Let me call the administration.”

“Of course. I will wait here,” Pharah replied and took a step back to the side of her desk, leaning nonchalantly against it, smiling and waiting, but just out of the woman’s sight. It did not take the nurse too long to be referred to another department - and yet another - and get so absorbed and frustrated with not finding any information about this, Pharah found a perfect moment to slip away and through the doors from which she had last seen Mercy emerge. Not a moment too soon - it was almost eight o’clock.

As she passed a cabinet, she took a quick look around and then snatched up a box before she continued down the hall. Trying to look as busy as possible, she held up a nurse in passing. “Sorry - I’m confused. I am supposed to deliver these to Dr. Ziegler...?”

The nurse looked a little stressed and irritated. “Office 234 ... or 235... somewhere up there.” She pointed at the stairs.

“Thanks a lot,” Pharah replied and went up the stairs to the second floor. She dropped the boxes she had grabbed onto the bottom of a cart full of equipment, mentally apologizing to anyone who had to figure out where these had come from and would have to return them. Then she passed a few more doors until she finally found Mercy’s name plate.

She knocked and waited for a reply. Sure enough, Mercy’s voice bid her come inside - and she did. She did not exactly enjoy the shock on Mercy’s face, nor the “How did you even get in here?”, but she had expected something like that.

“Don’t worry - your front desk nurse is going to find me and pull me out by my hair,” Pharah replied and closed the door behind her.

“Pharah - I have no time. I just got off my shift and my next one starts in an hour.”

“Then let’s have dinner. You have got to eat, I suppose.”

“I have paperwork to take care of. Head surgeon is not exactly a simple job.” Mercy sounded almost hostile and Pharah’s initial desire was to bite right back... but she also remembered what Mei had said: If there was still something on Mercy’s mind about Pharah, then it must be extremely confusing, maybe even painful to her.

Pharah sat down opposite of Mercy’s desk. “Mercy... please stop avoiding me.”

“I am not.”

“Then let me take you somewhere to eat so we can talk. The hospital cafeteria for all I care.”

“I told you, I am really busy,” Mercy replied, stacking some papers and putting them into a shelf behind her.

Pharah took a deep breath. This was frustrating, but she was not one to give up. She looked at Mercy, realizing for the first time that the woman was looking pretty worn down. Her skin was grayer than usual, her hair a little fuzzy and there were bags under her eyes. She usually wore ironed blouses under her lab coat - or that’s what Pharah had picked up while staying with her - but this one was crumpled.

She frowned. “How long have you been doing these extra shifts?” she blurted out with a small air

of shock. She feared she knew the answer.

“Things have been a little busy lately.”

“And they let you do that?” Wasn’t it dangerous to let someone seemingly sleep deprived and stressed put a scalpel into someone else’s body?

“I am head surgeon, I have the last word on the shift plans in my department,” Mercy clarified without much emotion.

Pharah sighed, taking a deep breath. “Is this because of me and Samantha?” she asked blatantly. “Because... this isn’t fair to anyone, including yourself and me and your patients.”

“You are assuming a lot, Pharah,” Mercy snapped back defensively.

The young Egyptian groaned. It was hard to get past Mercy’s cold, defensive exterior, but of course that is the kind of thing people turn to when trying to conceal whatever made them unhappy. Pharah reminded herself not to get upset. Just looking at how miserable Mercy appeared made that a lot easier.

“Look, Mercy... I am sorry. I think you got hurt. I had no idea, really.”

“No idea about what, Pharah?” Mercy shot back, making this all the lot harder. Because despite all the clues, Pharah could not presume she had any idea about Mercy’s feelings. All she had to go on was this drastic change in behavior since February 14th. Mercy probably knew that if Pharah made any direct assumptions, Mercy could outrightly mock them to get out of the conversation, making look Pharah like the fool who made up things about Mercy.

“Mercy, you are making this so difficult. You walked in on me having a date with someone on Valentine’s Day. You gave me chocolate and you were happy until my date arrived. Then you turned and left and you have been--” Pharah saw how Mercy took a breath to interrupt her, “--you have been avoiding me - and every day, you are looking increasingly more beaten.” She bit her lower lip. “Mercy, you got hurt that day, and I am sorry. Really. I just want to know what I can do.”

For all of the cold front that Mercy had put up to get rid of Pharah, she not only knew for sure now that Pharah had completely picked up on what had happened, she also knew she could not lie to her face and say she was mistaken. She tried to send her a mocking smile, well aware of the ridiculousness of Pharah wanting to do anything about this pain, when her just being here was at the heart of Mercy’s problems. But while her lips tried to smile it all away in mockery, her eyes betrayed her, filling with salty wetness.

Realizing she could not pull herself together, she turned her head, trying her best not to lose it, but fully aware that if she put out a single word right now, she would just start sobbing.

Pharah watched with pity and a heavy heart as Mercy tried to compose herself, failing so miserably. Stress and sleep deprivation probably did not help with controlling herself, either. And all of this struggle for her - stupid little Fareeha Amari who would scrape her knees and try to ignore her mother’s pleas to get the wounds cleaned.

Pharah swallowed to remove the lump from her throat, but Mercy’s struggle was affecting her. “Mercy... Sam and I are not together, if that helps any. It just did not work out.”

It didn’t. It made Mercy cover her eyes and just start crying. Pharah sat there in silence, letting her cry, feeling such pity for that amazing, smart and strong woman - who had achieved so much - being so down and broken because of this.

“Do you have to sit here and watch me cry?” Mercy sobbed eventually. “This is bad enough as it is.”

Pharah grabbed a tissue box off a shelf by the door and carried it over to Mercy, who grabbed one and proceeded to wipe her cheeks and eyes with it, avoiding any look at Pharah at all costs. This was so much worse than Pharah had imagined. How was she supposed to reconcile with someone this hurt, even though it really was not anyone’s fault?

She waited for the crying to subside, looking stricken as she stared at the table in front of her. Only when Mercy had calmed down did she dare to speak again. “I’m not even worth all these tears...and all the stress you put on yourself. - Remember how pissed you got when I ran away with that wound on my arm that you intended to stitch back together? You came all the way after me, sat me down and told me not to be scared.”

Mercy gave a half-choked laugh. “But you weren’t scared. You just wanted to keep playing.” His voice was still struggling.

“Exactly. I’m still that dumb kid, you know?”

Mercy shook her head. “You’re not. I wished you were, but you’re not. You have become a beautiful woman with a great sense of duty and a strong character. If I told you today that your wound needed stitching, you’d sit down, hold out your arm and tell me you don’t need an anaesthetic.”

“I’ll tell you a secret,” Pharah replied trying to smile. “When I say that, I really want an anaesthetic.”

Mercy tried to choke out a chuckle, but the tears were still there in her voice. Finally, though, she was looking at Pharah again.

“I’m not here to push you, okay?” Pharah said. “Maybe you can think about what will make you feel better - what you want me to do. I can take up more work with Helix to be away from you. Or less to be here more. And when you made up your mind, just tell me. Don’t be shy or nervous - I’ll listen and I’ll take you seriously and I will do everything in my power to fulfill whatever you are asking of me.”

Mercy shook her head with an air of sadness. “You know you don’t have to do this. My feelings are my problem, not yours.”

Pharah sighed. “Mercy, you are amazing and even if I am the reason you feel like this, I still care for you a lot. You’ve always been one of my heroes and if it was anyone else hurting you like that, I would go out of my way to make you feel better, too. Now, I want to do it all the more.”

‘But you would not go out with me,’ Mercy added in her head, the naked truth seeping into her heart bit by bit.

“That is kind of you. I will think about this,” Mercy promised. “But right now... I really want to be alone.”

Pharah slowly got up, accepting Mercy’s request, though feeling a little worried because it still did not look like Mercy was going to eat anything or cancel her second shift. Yet, she had promised to do what Mercy said and if her current request was to leave her alone, then Pharah would obey.

Pharah's request was clear and kind - tell me what you need and I will do what I can to make it happen. But finding an answer to what she wanted other than wanting her, that was something else. She could not bear the thought of not seeing Pharah, nor could she bear the thought of seeing her.

She could not bear the thought of a friendship with her, nor the thought of losing that friendship. There just seemed to be no way and no answer she could give Pharah to her request, however kindly meant it had been.

The weather was getting dreary again, so Mercy cancelled eating ice cream with Mei, thinking she couldn't bear indulging in that happy sweetness under the current circumstances, anyway - only to find herself indulging in a whole container of chocolate ice cream that same night. She decided she could allow herself a day of utter irresponsibility and continued emptying the box, but soon regretted it because all that sweetness made her stomach cramp in pain.

From then on, for Pharah's sake, Mercy did try to take better care of herself, putting herself onto more reasonable shifts and getting enough sleep. The latter was hard enough because in bed, her thoughts tended to go in circles, trying to figure out what to tell Pharah who was probably still waiting for an answer.

When the sun returned to them, Mei extended her invitation for ice cream once again and Mercy decided that part of taking care of herself was to socialize. Plus, she did actually want to catch up on all the things she had missed and ignored since Valentine's Day.

In the end it did not come too much as a surprise that Zarya had finally won the little scientist over. It seemed to Mercy that Mei only thought she was still tantalizing Zarya - the pink-haired Russian likely knew long since that she had won and let Mei believe that she was still being fought for.

There was a deep-running jealousy in Mercy. Zarya had managed what she could not - she had made Mei fall for her in the end - through her bold charm and persistent chasing. That kind of behavior was neither conformable with Mercy's far less well developed self-confidence, nor did she think that it usually worked.

For a lack of better options and comforted by the sweet taste of ice cream, she told Mei as much. After all, the little scientist had been on the receiving end of someone being blatantly won over against her will.

"You know, Zarya tried to just be my girlfriend all the time," Mei explained. "She just acted like she was, minus the kissing and intimacy, and ignored my eye-rolling. And I realized that it feels good to be in a relationship with someone that sweet and fun and honest. I kind of started to want it... or rather keep it." She giggled.

Mercy sighed. "That is never going to work on Pharah."

Mei chuckled. "You know what I really like right now?" she asked. Mercy looked up, curious. "You're thinking about how you can still win her over. You haven't actually given up. Maybe that is a good thing, you know?"

Mercy pulled Pharah away from the computers for a moment, shutting them both in the conference room. "I thought about what you said," she began right away. "And I know what I want you to do."

Pharah smiled - she had been worried Mercy would not take up her offer and was glad that

instead, she was going to be clear and direct about it, just as Pharah had promised she could do without worrying about the outcome.

“You said you could do more work here, right?” Mercy asked and Pharah confirmed it. “Good. Because I want you around more. You know - more exposure... getting used to you again, building our friendship.”

Pharah’s heart made a leap at that. She had been prepared to avoid Mercy, if she asked her to, or keep their relationship purely professional. But this was so much better and so much closer to what she had hoped for, despite putting her own desires last.

“I can do that,” she smiled. “We can do stuff together, if you want. Go to the zoo or something?” she offered.

“Yes,” Mercy agreed. “I’d like that.”

Pharah returned a bright smile to Mercy, feeling a wave of relief wash over her. She was really happy and could not stop herself from feeling elated the rest of the day. Mercy was still a hero but also someone fun to talk to, smart and - except for this setback - they actually got along so very well. She was glad she did not have to sacrifice their friendship.

“Fareeha, I cannot lie!” Mercy hissed, eyeing the front desk. “I am absolutely terrible at it!”

Pharah grinned. “She is a terrible human being, trust me. Also you are basically one of her bosses. Even if she saw right through any lies, she could not possibly call you out on them. It is such a safe bet!”

“But she knows who you are!”

“She has seen me twice and she did not even recognize me the second time. She cares so little for people, she will only recognize you because of your name tag, trust me.”

Mercy’s heart was pounding in her chest. She had never done anything like this before.

“Act natural,” Pharah hissed and nudged her forward.

‘Alright - here goes nothing,’ Mercy thought, straightened her posture and took some busy-looking steps towards the woman at the front desk. Pharah followed behind her.

“Excuse me nurse Paulson,” she said in as authoritative a tone as she could muster. “I need one of those guest IDs for Miss Amari here. She is going to be consulting us on specialized equipment for a while and needs to be able to walk into the neurosurgical ward without trouble.”

Nurse Paulson lowered her glasses to look at Mercy’s ID on her labcoat. “I will have to clear that with the head office,... Dr. Ziegler. Has the administration authorized Mrs---”

“Amari,” Pharah helped.

“---Amari for the consultation?”

“I have authorized her. After all, this is my department and according to the code from November 23rd, every department head is authorized to demand one ID tag for external specialists at any given time. That is why you have more than eight of them - so any department head can make such a request.”

"I have not heard of this change..." the nurse said unsurely.

"Nurse Paulson, I'll be kind - I don't have the time to come pick up Mrs. Amari every time I need her to check on machines that might save people's lives, or at least their limbs. I understand your reservations and I also understand that sometimes, it is difficult to be up to date with all the rule changes. It feels like we are getting ten emails every month with new procedures and requests. I get it. I am sure Dr. Imoto would not be as kind about being denied his rights, though, but luckily I am the first to make this request of you." She smiled at the nurse, but tried to add an air of impatience. "Look, all I want is an ID tag for someone I have just introduced to you and who I assure you is here on my authority and with my full trust. You can refer anyone who has a problem with that to me. I also really want to go back to my work." Her heart was still pounding - all that nurse needed to do was check for an email from November 23rd and realize there was no such rule change. She also had no idea whether or not there were eight or more IDs in that woman's possession at this time.

Instead of totally seeing through her, the receptionist nurse opened a drawer and pulled out a guest ID, put it into a machine and entered the code for the neurosurgical department, then handed it over to Pharah.

"Thanks a lot," Pharah replied kindly and then turned towards the doors to the neurosurgical department with Mercy. "So you are saying the prints from the machine are delayed, Dr. Ziegler?"

Once the door had fallen shut behind them, both burst out laughing. "Oh god, she is going to find out!" Mercy worried between laughter. "She is going to ask someone and I am going to be in trouble!"

"That woman?" Pharah snorted. "No way. She doesn't care. She just wants to go home and watch TV at the end of the day, trust me. Plus - so worth it!" she held up her new ID. "I can totally bother you any time I want now."

"Hey, you said you wanted that to cheer me up, not to bother me!" Mercy protested.

"Oh, that isn't the same thing?"

Mercy was worried for a split second but then realized that Pharah would never really interfere with anything important at the hospital and be willing to leave her be if things got rough. In fact, she felt a little proud they had managed this and was looking forward to seeing Pharah around in this well-equipped, albeit somewhat dreary place more often.

"8,478 for charity - and I will not bandage a single teddy bear ever again!" Pharah groaned and put the box with all the money she had counted aside.

"Are you sure?" Mercy teased. "You kind of get used to bandaging things up after a couple of years, I promise!"

"Actually - thinking about it, it might be worth it just to watch Zarya despair again over how so many children are so scared of her."

Zarya pouted. "I was being all nice and I made the most wonderful bandages, too!" she protested.

Mei patted her arm. "It's not you, it's them. They can't see how sweet and soft you actually are - they just see a tattooed lady that could ram them into the ground."

Zarya raised an eyebrow, then turned to Mercy and Pharah. "Is she complimenting me? I think

that's a compliment, right?" She smiled. "See, I am all special to Mei!"

"Always so hopeful," Mei sighed. But she could fool no one, of course. Mei's bedroom had long since morphed into a guest room, after all (much to Mercy's delight).

"Well, I will certainly need a bodyguard transporting that much cash to the bank to put on the charity account..." Mercy said with her voice trailing off.

"Helix security is at your service!" Pharah saluted.

"What, you are going to charge me, captain?" Mercy asked. "This is for charity, you know?"

"Sorry, but my time is very valuable. It will cost you at least a cocktail and a plate of snacks."

"That price is beyond reasonable, Captain Amari... but I have no other options, so I guess I will have to pay this out of my own pocket...!"

"So not sorry," Pharah replied, smirking. She loved that she could joke with Mercy like that in one moment and then run an excellent, serious airspace maneuver the next. In war, a bit of humor was important. She stretched a little and grabbed the money box. "I shall guard this with my life until tomorrow," she promised.

"Mercy, you are staying?" Mei asked.

"Sure. Why not? Someone has to make sure Captain Amari is doing her job right tonight, guarding that box."

"Excuse me? I have an excellent record when it comes to my missions."

"Mornin'" Pharah mumbled, passing Mei in the hallway who was carrying two mugs over to Zarya's bedroom. "I'm gonna shower real quick, but I won't block the bathroom for long."

"Sure!" Mei smiled.

Pharah proceeded to the door and stepped inside.

It was only then that Mei stopped in her tracks, nearly spilling the coffee. "Wait, Fareeha, Mercy is---" The door clicked shut. "Well..." Mei mumbled. "That shall be interesting."

Sure enough, a moment later, a little shriek came from the bathroom, echoing off the shower walls. Mercy had been just about to step out of the shower when she found herself face to face with Fareeha by the door, both women staring at each other with a deer-in-headlights look.

Mercy caught herself first and jumped back into the shower, grabbing the shower curtain.

"PHARAH!!!"

"Ahhh! Oh god, Mercy - I'm -so- sorry!" Pharah stuttered, for once caught off guard. She tried to back out of the door, but it was still shut and she bumped with her back hard against the door handle. "Ow!" Why on earth had Mercy not locked the door?! Now Pharah had a lasting image in her mind of a naked Mercy flashing her full front at her - complete with wet hair and water running down her body. How was Mercy nearly forty while still looking like that, anyway?

Beyond the shower curtain, there was tense silence. Pharah was trying to reach behind herself to find the door handle, though it would evidently have been smarter to just turn around. Somehow

that did not occur to her. She had just reached it and was about to open the door when she heard... laughter.

Mercy was cracking up behind her shower curtain, obviously over her brief moment of shock.

“Hey! How is it that funny, huh?”

Mercy peeked out from behind the curtain. “Look at what has happened here,” Mercy laughed. “I am too used to living alone to lock the door and you are too used to people locking the door because you don’t live alone.”

“I would say not locking the door was the graver mistake,” Pharah protested.

“And I think not knocking is bad behavior,” Mercy retorted.

Mercy was looking so different with her hair down, Pharah noted. It was wet, thus looking a little darker than normally, and it reached much further down her shoulders than Pharah would have guessed. Mei taking off her glasses had a similar effect - the difference it made was remarkable. Mercy looked even younger.

“And what are you looking at?” Mercy wondered, realizing Pharah was staring.

“Your hair,” Pharah replied quickly, not able to think of anything less odd to reply. “I’ve never seen it down.”

Mercy sent her an amused little smile. “You expected me to shower with my hair in a pony tail?”

“No. When I walked in here I kind of did not expect you to be in the shower at all. Or anywhere near it,” Pharah corrected and finally remembered to open the door.

“Fair enough,” Mercy replied. “I’ll let you know when I am done.”

Pharah left, a little flushed and still rather embarrassed. The badly muffled giggles from Zarya and Mei’s room did not exactly help.

Mercy had fully adapted to the dorm-style life whenever she was over. Since D.va was still gone shooting a movie, the kimchi part of the breakfast was currently replaced by cheese, jam, croissants and yoghurt. All Swiss.

The rest - from the sausages to the veggies and falafel - was still there, too - the latter neatly set out for Pharah to join them, once she was out of the shower.

Zarya playfully fluffed Mercy’s hair. “Somewhere under this pinkness, I am just that blond,” she commented.

“I can’t even imagine,” Mercy replied. “That pink is such a trademark for you.”

“If you need a hair tie, let me know,” Mei offered. “I have plenty.”

“Oh, I have one,” Mercy smiled, raising a hand to show it around her wrist. “My hair is just still damp.” Of course that wasn’t the reason. She had not missed that her hair had distracted Pharah for a moment. So if that was the sort of thing that she liked, Mercy was very inclined to offer it.

And indeed, when she returned from the shower to join the breakfast table, Pharah’s gaze did get caught on Mercy for a moment before she sat down and poured herself some tea. Mei sent Mercy

a curious look, but even though Mercy caught it, she made no move to react.

“So, off to the bank after breakfast?” Pharah asked.

“Yes. And then we should probably take the donation slip to the hospital before it gets lost.”

“Understood,” Pharah replied, sending another long look at Mercy. She could not help but remember what she had seen, however much she tried to avoid thinking about it. It was not like Mercy’s Valkyrie suit was hiding much, but apparently it had been hiding some things because those hips and breast au naturel had been pretty distracting.

“Do you have to work today?” Pharah asked, mostly to distract herself.

“Not much. I agreed to come in for one extended operation. Expected to last about four hours - but that is all. Because really, I’ll be no longer useful after that.”

“Four hours?!” Pharah echoed. “That’s extreme!”

Mercy nodded. “It’s a lot of concentration, but neurosurgery is often like that. So many little nerves and capillaries to take care of. It looks like in this case, I am the only one who can attempt it, so I scheduled this for a free day.”

“What’s the risk if it doesn’t succeed?” Mei wanted to know.

Mercy sighed. “I’d rather not think about it while eating.”

“Oh, okay. Are you nervous, then?”

“I am trying to keep my confidence and I know I will be calm and collected once the surgery is running, but right now... I am really scared,” Mercy admitted.

“I can’t even imagine,” Pharah commented.

Pharah was waiting in front of the operating room. Mercy had not asked her to stop by, but earlier, when she had dropped her off at the hospital, she had seemed incredibly nervous and been very distracted, her head already going through the different details of the surgery.

Pharah had not grasped, up until this point, that Mercy - an expert, prodigy, absolute specialist in her field of work, could get this worried. Pharah had tried to lighten the mood and make her feel better by asking her what exactly was so hard on her.

“I am trying to save a life,” Mercy said. “And it all depends on me. And there is a family, waiting outside, praying that I don’t screw up and kill their loved one. And I can’t promise that I won’t because I am just a human after all. And I will wreck myself trying to do everything right and I might still fail. But then I will have to walk out there and tell them what happened and appear professional, clarify that it was an expected risk and that I couldn’t have done anything to save him... while the entire time, my head will go through hours of surgery, demanding I find out where I went wrong and how I dared to screw up on something this important.”

“Oh. Wow...” Pharah had just answered because she could not come up with anything more profound. At that moment it had been clear for Pharah that whatever the outcome, she wanted to be there for Mercy. So four hours after the start of the surgery, she was sitting there, a bit away from the family that was looking deadly worried, respecting their privacy.

The surgery was delayed, which was a bad sign, Pharah assumed. An hour ticked by and then half of another. Eventually Pharah used her ID tag to go beyond the waiting area and to the row of operating rooms. Beyond the third window, Mercy was standing above her patient, four nurses and a colleague around her, moving her hands with full concentration. Under the mask and coat, she could not see much of Mercy's expression, but her movements were very precise and her team seemed to be very comfortable with her commands.

It took another thirty minutes until she finally stepped away from the table and related more instructions to the people around her. Pharah could see her wander from the operating room to the small area beyond and start cleaning herself and discarding her gloves and other protective gear. She looked endlessly exhausted and it was impossible to read anything on her face at this time, but fatigue.

By the time she stepped out she was in her lab coat again and Fareeha was waiting opposite of the door, much to Mercy's surprise.

"That looked intense," Pharah commented. Mercy looked at her and it was like she did not even see Pharah. She walked into the hall and sank down onto one of the plastic chairs there, bent over and rubbing over her face tiredly.

"Goodness, Mercy, are you alright?"

Mercy lifted a hand dismissively. "Give me a second... I am just exhausted." She looked over from behind her hands, caught Pharah's worried look and tried to appease it with a smile. "Really, I mean it. This is normal. I just got out of six hours of intense concentration, I really need a moment.." She reached into her lab coat pocket and pulled out a small dextrose candy to pop into her mouth. "See? I come well-prepared."

"Are you going to talk to the family outside? They look worried."

Mercy nodded. "I will. And I am sorry they have to worry a little longer, but I am not yet ready." Despite feeling for the family and every extra second they needed to worry, Mercy's need for a short break was more than justified and perfectly understandable.

"Also... the patient is not stable yet. The anaesthetist will wake him a little and then we will see how he is doing. I should really not talk to the family before I know more."

Pharah nodded. "And... are you worried?"

Mercy nodded. "Humans and their bodies are unpredictable. I am feeling like this went well, but I have been surprised too often to dare pass a verdict just yet."

"Wow. I never knew it was so tough."

Mercy smiled. "It's tough - and amazing - and sometimes really scary... and sometimes full of elation." She relaxed against the wall, taking a breath. After a moment, already looking way better, she folded her hands together and leaned forward again, waiting. Pharah could tell she was nervous - she did not look that much different from the family outside: She was fiddling with her fingers and biting her lower lip, occasionally sending glances in the direction they had wheeled her patient off.

Finally, her colleague emerged and came down the hallway, his surgical mask pulled down around his neck. "Stable," he said, looking almost as exhausted as Mercy had only moments earlier.

Mercy release a sigh of relief and got up. "I'll be right back," she told Pharah and went outside to

talk to the patient's family.

The other surgeon threw a curious glance at Pharah. "Friend of Angela's?" he guessed.

Pharah smiled. "Yeah. I haven't been here before, though. I thought she'd be more excited, but I guess she is just really exhausted."

The surgeon pulled off his mask completely and smiled good-naturedly at Pharah. "Just wait. It usually doesn't really sink in until she has told the family."

Pharah nodded. "So... this was quite a challenge, I understand?"

"Angela did something amazing just now. That's the only way to put it," he replied. "She might have proven the impossible - and I think she knows it, too. There were about five high ranking colleagues in the field telling her not to go through with this and she has just proven all of them completely wrong. I know of no one else who'd be that headstrong and capable."

"Wow. She did not mention that..."

The surgeon glanced at his watch. "I really need to change. Nice meeting you. Celebrate a little with her - she deserves it." He winked at her. It was only then that Pharah realized who he thought she really was - or rather, what he thought she was for Mercy.

Moments later, the door opened, and Mercy returned, her heart pounding, a bright smile on her face. She had done it! Bathing in the relief and happiness and heartfelt thanks of the family was one thing, but having actually succeeded in this particularly difficult operation was a true reward.

Pharah got up, so very relieved to see Mercy smile like that. Her lab coat was flowing as she came down the hallway, looking back for a moment to make sure she was not being watched by the family anymore. Once she was sure of that, she let her true elation take hold of her: She skipped a step, clenched her fists in victory and yelled: "I did it!"

Pharah laughed. "You did!!! You're amazing!"

"I know!" Mercy shouted back and then, without thinking, flung herself into Pharah's arms. Pharah hugged her back and Mercy actually squealed with joy, muffled by Pharah's shoulder. She was being absolutely adorable and Pharah was so relieved that this had turned out so well. Mercy had looked so worried this morning and then so exhausted after the surgery. Now she was all elated and proud of herself - and rightfully so.

Mercy lifted her head, looking at Pharah without disengaging. "Oh, it feels so good!" she laughed, looking at Pharah, inches from her face. The gaze from those bright blue eyes dropped from Pharah's eyes, down to her lips... And at that moment, Pharah knew what was going to happen - she could feel it in the air between them so clearly, and yet, when Mercy snatched her lips in a thoughtless, careless kiss, full of enthusiasm, she felt a tinge of surprise. And what a kiss it was - every bit of elation that Mercy felt seemed to go right into it, jumping over to Pharah like a spark. She knew she had missed that crucial opportunity to turn her head or step away, but she had not. She had let it happen.

For the moment, she did not know why. Maybe because it would have been cruel to trample on Mercy's triumph... maybe she really just wanted it to happen. Pharah stumbled back, just a few centimeters, until her back hit the wall. She slipped her arms more tightly around Mercy's waist, kissing her back and keeping her close. Realizing the lack of retaliation, Mercy went all out, turning the heated lip-battle into a full tongue-kiss - and Pharah kept her eyes closed and kissed back, her breath picking up much like Mercy's.

It was heavenly. As stupid as it was, here, in this particular hallway, with Mercy in her labcoat and Pharah intruding with a surreptitiously obtained access card, it was also damn hot and gave Pharah all sorts of tingles on her skin, in her belly and chest.

She was all out of breath when Mercy finally pulled away from her lips. This was the moment when the boundaries should have been clarified, latest. The last moment to pull back. But Pharah just snatched Mercy's lips again, kissing her softly. Mercy's heart took a leap at that and she returned the sweet kiss. It lasted way shorter than the first, but was even more meaningful.

"If this is the reward," Mercy whispered. "I will do this surgery 100 times again."

Pharah leaned her forehead against Mercy's and smiled. "You really don't need to."

THE END

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